

Garbage on the Streets of Harlem

The streets of Harlem are filled with garbage from morning to night. Most of the garbage comes from restaurants and shops in the area.

Walking along 125th St., restaurants and stores line the streets, spilled coffee cups wet the sidewalk, and flocks of birds dive into the cement attacking the fallen chip crumbs. Piles of clear trash bags with a small knot at the top, holding pounds of garbage, clutter subway stairs and bus stops. The city has set hours and regulations for businesses to dispose of their garbage and give fines when regulations are violated. The fines put in place are so nominal that garbage still fills the streets causing anger and frustration for residents in the districts.

The city requires businesses to use a private service for their daily garbage pick up, where they are charged by the pound of garbage they produce each day. Rules regarding commercial garbage pick up for businesses allow owners limited options of when to dispose of their trash. When the rules are violated, New York Department of Sanitation charges the business a \$100 fine. If violations continue, the maximum penalty for storeowners is \$350 but can be \$100 each time if the owner pays in 20 days. When a late night pick up is scheduled, businesses are allowed to place it on the street one hour before closing. Wing stop associate Sami Khan said, “we put our garbage out at 5 or 6 every day and it sits there until 12a.m. when it gets picked up.” If the pick up is during store hours, the trash can be set outside two hours before it will get picked up. Stephanie Oriach, manager at the 125th St. Olive Garden Restaurant said, “we opened this location in December, and

we've already received multiple garbage violations." The penalties are so miniscule, it allows restaurants to put their garbage out when convenient, and pay the \$100 when necessary.

Apart from putting the garbage on the street at specific times, private service fees for each pick up can become costly. Business owners avoid their high costs by placing a percentage of their garbage in the public litter baskets on the corner of the street. These litter baskets, picked up by New York's Department of Sanitation once each day between 6a.m. and 2p.m. are meant for a cup of coffee or a candy wrapper. They were made to hold trash for up to three days. The excess trash being put in these baskets causes overflow and litter on the streets.

Residents are frustrated by the every day garbage problem, seeing it outside of their homes, walking through it on the streets, and breathing in the constant stench. The garbage has brought all kinds of animals into the area, causing serious health concerns. Resident Hazel Dukes said, "there are rats and insects roaming the streets everywhere, I have even seen hawks searching for food on 125th St." The garbage has created more problems than just the unattractive views for residents in the area. When the spoiled food and empty plastic containers mixed in the massive rubber black bags sit in the sun all day, different odors are created disturbing those passing by. Resident Barbra Askin said, "the scents make our home and area unappealing to everyone around." She brought on another problem, "the heat mixed with the foods, and the materials bring so many chemicals into the air that we are constantly breathing in."

Department of Sanitation is well aware of the sanitation problem on the streets of Harlem. Community Affairs Officer, Ignazio Terranova spoke at a District 10 city hall meeting, “there are more establishments because Harlem has become the new hotspot but that can’t create clutter on the streets.” Terranova offered his time to approach businesses that are known as garbage violators and fine them upfront. He said, “this approach should help understand who is contributing to the problem.” Since the meeting was held... TK progress?

Sami Khan, the manager at Wing Stop in the center of restaurant row said their garbage is a daily problem. The restaurant has yet to receive a garbage violation but the associates suffer from the smell as it sits in the store. They keep their garbage in the back in order to keep the dinning area from smelling like rotten food. Sami said, “we put the garbage out when we’re supposed to but that doesn’t stop the streets from filling with trash.” The homeless people dig through the garbage bags in search for food, leaving fallen items on the ground and gapping holes in the plastic when they are done. On the other hand, Olive Garden disposes their garbage on an as needed basis. Manager Stephanie Oriach said, “we usually take the garbage out once at 9a.m. and once before 8p.m., and it all gets picked up around 12.a.m” She continued, “the food industry never stops” there isn’t a solution to getting rid of the trash in a respectful way. Olive Garden has received multiple fines for their violations and received multiple complaints from their neighbors. Stephanie said, corporate businesses have strict security rules, “the back door can’t be opened one hour before closing time at 10p.m.” The security prohibits Olive Garden associates from disposing their trash at a respectful time to their neighbors.

The garbage issue has been of much conversation through out the community. Resident Hazel Dukes said, “anyone is welcome into our community as long as they respect us, too.”